

## **Elizabeth Robinson**

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The women of Illinois' past have accomplished a lot, and Elizabeth Robinson was one of those women. She was the first woman to win a track and field gold medal at the Olympics. She did it once, and then when disaster struck, she made a comeback and won another. The Women's Rights movement took a big step when women were able to compete in the Olympic Games, and Elizabeth led that with her gold medal.

Elizabeth was born August 23, 1911, and was raised in Riverdale, Illinois. She attended Thornton High School, and that is where her amazing adventure began. A high school staff member spotted her sprinting to catch a train, and suggested that she started running competitively. A few weeks later she joined the Illinois Women's Athletic Club, and made her running debut. In the 100 m, she finished only second behind the current U.S. record holder. Then at the Olympic trials she tied the world record at twelve seconds. At the age of 16, she competed to the 1928 Olympics. Both the founder of the Olympics and the Pope were against letting women into the games, but they had been allowed to participate anyway. Elizabeth took the gold medal in the 100m by .1 second. She also helped the 4x100 relay get the silver medal.

In 1931, Robinson was involved in a plane crash, and was severely injured. Unconscious for 7 weeks, she was thought dead, but she had survived. Although she was unable to walk normally for 2 years, she recovered, and started training again. Women's rights took another step when, according to historian Adam Szreter, "she graduated from Northwestern University, from where she became the first woman to be awarded a varsity

“N”.” She had missed the 1932 Olympics that were held in America, but came back and was able to compete in the 1936 Games in Berlin. Due to the metal rod that had been inserted into her leg, she was unable to take the starting stance for the 100m. Therefore, she was the third leg in the 4x100, where she could start from a standing position, and got the gold medal.

Elizabeth soon retired after her remarkable feat. She ended her Olympic career with two gold medals and one silver. In 1939, she married Richard Schwartz, owner of an upholstery firm. She continued her involvement in the sports through time-keeping and traveling the United States, speaking on behalf of the Women’s Athletic Association and the Girls’ Athletic Association. She was inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame, the USA Track and Field Hall of Fame, and the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame. She passed away May 18, 1999.

Elizabeth Robinson achieved much throughout her lifetime. Events in her life ranged from being the first woman Olympic track and field gold medalist, to surviving a fatal crash, and then returning to win another gold medal a few years later. People look up to miraculous stories like this and Elizabeth will be forever remembered in the history of Illinois. It is the women like Elizabeth Robinson who stand out more than all the other women in the history of Illinois. She may not be the most famous, but her unique story puts her above the rest. [From Alex Madding, “Elizabeth Robinson,” *Sprintic Magazine*. 2008. [http://www.sprintic.com/athletes/elizabeth\\_robinson/](http://www.sprintic.com/athletes/elizabeth_robinson/). (Oct. 11, 2008); David L. Porter, “Schwartz, Elizabeth Robinson,” *American National Biography Online*. 2008. <http://www.anb.org/articles/19/19-00969-print.html>. (Oct. 11, 2008); and Adam Szreter, “Obituary: Elizabeth Robinson,” *The London Independent*. 2008. May 28, 1999

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